

Creating Effective Teams

You know how you've always wanted a team that could deliver results and work at an optimal level? Over the years much research has been done around team dynamics & what the elements are that create an effective team. The reality is that there is no reason why we can't create teams that consistently deliver results. Effective teams are all about relationships. A team lead establishes a strong rapport with the team and helps everyone cultivate positive working relationships with their colleagues.

Here are the common traits, what I'll call the "4-C's", of peak performance teams:

Creating a Blueprint

Peak performance teams know how to create. It all begins with a leader that helps the team create a "blueprint" that answers the following questions provides clarity to the team about the structure of the team and inspires individual team members to associate meaning and contribution to their work:

- **What is the Ultimate Result the team will accomplish?** Having a crystal-clear objective helps a team define what the end objective of the team is.
- **Why is this result important?** Understanding & embracing purpose motivates & inspires individual team members about the impact and meaning achieving the ultimate result will have.
- **Is there a MAP in place?** Create a Massive Action Plan that breaks down into manageable chunks the specific milestones and deadlines of what needs to happen in order to complete the project. This includes establishing roles & accountability. Have roles been clearly established? Who will do what? By when? How? What can be delegated? Are the resources (time, money and people) in place to execute on the plan? Finally, who and how are we monitoring progress?

Commitment to Trust, Ownership and Communication

Think of a journey that takes across the sea. A crew will have a destination in mind, they'll be excitement about the journey and even a plan for how to get there but that "blueprint" alone is not enough. Now, individual team members need to actually work together to create synergy and momentum that will drive the team forward.

- **Is there a solid foundation of trust within the team?** High performance teams establish rapport and trust with each other. Without this critical foundation the team will struggle to be unified simply because team members can't rely on each other, they question intents and hesitate to share ideas and feelings.

- **Is there a commitment to ownership & responsibility?** Team members appreciate that others rely and depend on them and so they need to follow through on their commitments.
- **Is there an awareness & appreciation of individuals' different approaches to communication and differences in thinking styles and life experiences?** Research indicates that emotional & social intelligence, the ability to be attune to others and be able to work with them, results in better team dynamics. Peak performance teams often make a commitment early on to develop an awareness of these similarities and differences by doing an assessment (i.e. Myers-Briggs, DiSC, Social Styles, etc.). With these insights individuals are more attune to how to better communicate with individual team members.

Constructive Conflict

No journey or project is ever complete without some challenges that invariably come up. The reality is that breakthroughs and goals are only ever met after the team struggles with not only the projects, goals and results being worked on but also the personal problems that come up.

- **Has the team anticipated disagreements that might come up and how to handle those challenges?** Is there a process in place for how (and who) will help the team resolve the “soft” interpersonal issues that come up?
- **Has the team agreed on what roles each person plays? Is there agreement on how certain decisions will be made?** Is there a process in place for how (and who) will help the team resolve questions being worked on? Who is responsible for establishing periodic team meetings, delegating responsibilities, assigning tasks, etc.?
- **Does the team have a contingency plan in place?** Setbacks are normal. Budgets change. Individual team members sometimes get pull into other projects or end up leaving for personal or professional reasons. Plan for the unexpected and the team will be better able to manage those bumps on the road that come up.
- **Breakthrough or breakdown?** Despite all the planning and good intentions stress is a natural by-product of any team. Unmanaged, stress results in a breakdown of the individual (i.e. illness, lack of energy, inattention to commitments, etc.). In order to achieve consistent performance individuals, and the leader, need to be attune to the morale of the team, the challenges individuals might be personally having and ultimately taking the time to take care of themselves.

Celebrate Success

After results are created there is nothing more disheartening for a team then for their collective efforts to be unrecognized.

- At the end of a project, does the team take the moment to celebrate its accomplishments? Though the customer might be pleased with the results, a research paper is published, or a specific project complete there is still a need for the group to celebrate its accomplishments. Celebrating (such as having an after-work event, team lunch, team retreat, etc.) reinforces the notion that the collective team efforts got results and reminds individuals about why the project was so important.

Resources and Book Recommendations for Teams

Each of these traits listed above has been explored in even more depth and detail in a variety of resources. The following is a list of books, not all inclusive, that will help leaders, team leads and individuals develop their skills even more:

- The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable by Patrick Lencioni
- Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Action by Simon Sinek
- Harvard Business Review on Building Better Teams by Bob Frisch
- The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player by John Maxwell
- The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey
- The Speed of Trust by Stephen M.R. Covey
- Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman
- Tony Robbins' Rapid Planning Method